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Talisman

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Talisman

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This ensemble was inspired by the iconic hand-shaped amulet called the *hamsa* in Judaism. The *hamsa*, a symbol of luck and protection, is also found in multiple cultures near the Mediterranean Sea and in the Middle East. The *hamsa* most often serves to protect the home, and generally features an all-seeing blue eye that is thought to ward against the evil eye.

The goal for this project was to artistically interpret the *hamsa* through digital printing techniques. The strapless cotton sateen bandeau top is yellow with the traditional good-luck blue eye across the front. After the pattern pieces were completed, they were digitized into Optitex, a computerized pattern-making software, at which point the design was drawn specifically for each pattern piece using Adobe Illustrator. It was then printed using a Mimaki TX2-1600 digital textile printer.

Yellow was chosen to reclaim it from its use in discriminatory practices, such as the yellow Jewish star demanded by the Nazis. The usage of yellow for this ensemble was meant to create something joyful out of something shameful. On the yellow background, the bodice also features a scattered pattern of the Hebrew word *chai*, which both literally translates to “life” and stands on its own as a Judaic



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symbol of longevity and luck. The watchful eye was engineered to match across the princess seams of the bodice and the *chais* match across every seam. The bodice closes in back using grommets and a red soutache lace.



The cotton sateen skirt is made up of seven overlapping *hamsas* mounted on the waistband of a lined underskirt. The *hamsas* were also drawn in Illustrator, beginning with a digitally manipulated photograph of a blue eye to create the background. The blue suggests both the good fortune promised with the all-seeing blue eye on the *hamsa* as well as the blue of the Israeli flag, itself a reference to the traditional Jewish prayer shawl. Once a mockup was constructed to establish the desired scale for the skirt, the final *hamsa* was drawn with a red outline, a red *chai*, and a white free-form organic mehndi-inspired design. The *hamsas* were cut into panels, interfaced for stiffness, and lined in red to match the outline. Each *hamsa* was hand-stitched to the underskirt and to each other at the waist and through the hips, which allows the *hamsas* to move freely from hip to hem. The *hamsas* circle the waist, creating a 360-degree talisman against bad luck. Together, the *chais* on the bandeau and the *hamsas* of the skirt envelop the wearer within a full ring of protection, while the multiple eyes remain vigilant against evil.